

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**EASTERN NATIONAL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
“AFTER THE LAST GENERATION:
LOWELL’S TEXTILE WORKERS, 1958-1998, PART II”**

INFORMANT: FRANCISCA DESOUSA

INTERVIEWER: KIMBERLY SZEWCZYK, GRAY FITZSIMONS

DATE: APRIL 11, 2002

G = GRAY

F = FRANCISCA

K = KIMBERLY

Tape 02.03

G: All right. We are in the Boott Cotton Mills Museum. It is Thursday, April 11th. I'm here with Kimberly Szewczyk, and our special guest, Francisca DeSousa. Am I pronouncing your name correctly?

F: Yes. Yes.

G: Francisca.

F: Francisca, yes.

G: Francisca, I see. Okay. Francisca, it's great to have you here.

F: Thank you.

G: What I'd like to do is ask you a few questions about your family background. And first of all tell us, where were you born?

F: I was born in Terceira Island in the Azores. I'm Portuguese.

G: How do you spell the name of the town?

F: That's T E R C E I R A, Terceira.

G: Ah huh, and how large a family are you from?

F: I have two more sisters, and my father was a police officer, (G: Ah huh) and my mother is a home, a home mom.

G: And where do you fit into the family?

F: I'm the middle child. (G: Okay) Yes. Well I was always jealous of my older sister, and because she has a beautiful blonde hair. She was blonde, and I was not blonde. So. (G: Ah huh) And my younger sister, she was the only one with the privilege for everything. She could do anything she wanted because she was the youngest. So I was the middle child. [Chuckles]

G: And were your parents both Portuguese decent?

F: Yes, my parents are Portuguese. Yes, my father passed away seven years ago, (G: Okay. Ah huh) and my mother is still alive. She had a little stroke, but she's eighty-five now.

G: Okay. Ah huh.

F: But she's doing good.

G: Okay. And what year were you born?

F: '49

G: 1949. (F: 1949) And so you were the middle child. (F: Yes) And tell us about your schooling. Did you go to school?

F: I went to school, to high school and I have one year of college. And after I got my job, (G: Umhm) because I was willing to get my money and my things. (G: Ah huh) So I went to a typewriting school, and after I went to school to be, you know, to learn the language, and I went to my job. I had a couple of interviews in the base, because it was not easy to get in. And after I got my job in 1969. I was a keypunch operator. I was there for about two years, and after I got a better opportunity on, was a GS3 I believe. I was GS2 at the time. It was more money. So they gave me opportunity to be a clerk typist. So I went to work with Major, with Captain Finch, and Captain Clark, and Captain Burtt, and they were all beautiful, beautiful people.

G: Now, and this was an Air Force Base?

F: In the Air Force Base, yes.

G: And where was the base?

F: It was in [Unclear], Terceira. I had to take a bus for about one hour, (G: Oh really?) yes, from my house to the place where I was working.

G: And were you living at home when you were working there?

F: I was living home with my, my parents. I just left the house when I got married. (G: Ah huh) I didn't have money for an apartment or anything.

G: Now did you get married in the Azores?

F: In the Azores, 1972.

G: Okay. Ah huh. And how long did you work at the air force base.

F: For about three years.

G: For five years. Okay.

F: In 1973 I came to United States.

G: 1973. (F: 1973) But before you came to the U.S. were you, you had that GS position there, a government position at the Air Force Base?

F: As a civilian, yah.

G: As a civilian.

F: GS, it was a GS4. (G: Ah huh) A GS4.

G: Were you required to be a citizen of the U.S. to have that job?

F: No. No. (G: Ah huh) Right there, no.

G: Okay. Ah huh.

F: You just apply for a job and if you are qualified (G: Yes) they will give you an opportunity to work there.

G: And you met obviously a lot of Americans there.

F: Oh yes, Americans they are very nice people. Most of them, they were wonderful people.

G: Did you meet anyone from Lowell?

F: No. They were all from California, Utah, Montana, all that (--)

G: Servicemen and their families?

F: Yes, families, yes, very nice people.

G: And so, and why did you decide to come to the United States?

F: Because I got married, (A: Ah huh) and my husband had all of his family over here.

G: Oh really.

F: And he has a job there that he was not, he was a mechanic, auto mechanic, and he was not making too much money. So he says, his family, all the brothers were over here, and the mother and the father. So they said, "Oh, it's better if you come over, and you have a better opportunity and a better job, and you can live better." So we got married and he came first. And after he went back and I came later on, a year later I came here.

G: Where did you meet him?

F: In the Azores. I was fourteen years old, and he was seventeen. [Both laugh]

G: Ah huh. Was he a high school student?

F: Yes. Yes.

G: Ah huh. Okay. So you dated while he was in high school?

F: Yes, we dated for a while. After he went into the army, and he came back. That's when we got married.

G: Okay. Now, and by the way, what was his name?

F: Antonio. (G: Antonio) Antonio DeSousa. (G: Okay. Okay) Yah, that's my husband.

G: And how old were you when you married?

F: Twenty-three.

G: And so he was twenty-six.

F: He was twenty-six.

G: Okay. And were you living together, husband and wife for a little while there, before?

F: No, no, no. We just stayed there for the honeymoon. (G: Aaah, okay) We went to a beautiful place by the seaside. And we were on the honeymoon there for two weeks. And after that he came right away (G: Okay) for the United States, because he just have two weeks from his job. (G: Ah huh) He couldn't stay longer. So after that we have to go to the Council, United States Council, and we have to ask permission. So there's a lot of paper work back and forth. We have to go to the doctor and make sure we are not sick and we have no diseases, big diseases. So it takes about a year. It took about a year, and after I came here to be with my husband.

G: So he was over here for a year while you were still (--)

F: Before, yes.

G: I see, okay.

F: He could come here earlier because he has his family. His family call him like, even they make the papers for him so he could come here legal. But I was not legal because I didn't have nobody in this country. (G: Yes) So after I got married, of course I could come over here.

G: Okay. Ah huh.

F: So that's why he came first. He got some money. He went back there. We got married. We got married there, and after I came a year later.

G: And what, where was he over here in the U. S.? Where did he live?

F: He was always in Lowell.

G: In Lowell?

F: Always in Lowell. (G: Ah huh) That's where they have the jobs. At the time they had a lot of jobs. Not now.

G: Ah huh, and this was in the early 1970's, or?

F: Yes, 1973.

G: 1973. (F: Yes) And he had brothers here you said?

F: All brothers. He has five brothers in here.

G: And they were all in Lowell?

F: All, no. One is in Dracut. One is in New Bedford, and one is in Pelham, and now one is Canada.

G: Okay. Okay. But were they back in 1973?

F: They were all around here.

G: Oh they were all around. (F: All around) Okay. And what sort of jobs did they have here?

F: Oh, one is a salesman that lives in New Bedford. Freetown is close to New Bedford. And Henry has his own business. He has a travel agency. And John is retired now. And my husband, he's working on Bradford Industries. He's a batcher, something like that. I don't even know what kind a job is that.

G: What do they manufacture there?

F: they manufacture seat cars, you know the, I don't know what they call that?

K: Upholstery?

F: Yes, but he's, they make, they make earplugs. They make the safety, what they call that for the cars? (G: Airbags?) Airbags! (G: Yes) Airbags for the cars. (G: Yes. Umhm) All that kind of stuff. It's been very, very, very slow there too. Now it's picking up a little bit, but for a year he just work three days a week. (G: Oh) He was working three days a week for a year.

G: Now did he start there way back in 1970?

F: No, no, no. He was working at Stratos Auto Sales. He was a mechanic there. (G: Okay) He was the first man that he worked on Middlesex Street. (G: On Middlesex) It was the first job he had, it was there, (G: Ah huh. Okay) and he was there for a couple of years. And after they shut down, they went bankruptcy. And he went to work for his brother, because he had his own business. It was furniture. He was in furniture.

G: Umhm. Sales?

F: Salesman. (G: Okay) So he was working with him for about seven or eight years. And they went bankruptcy.

G: This was the brother. This was the brother in Lowell who had a furniture (--)

F: Yah, he had DeSousa Furniture on Middlesex Street, and he was delivering furniture and going all over Mass. He had a very good business at that time, but things went bad. So he had to shut down the place. And my husband went to Wang, Wang Laboratories. (G: Yes) He was working there for a couple of years. (G: Ah huh) I think eight or nine years he worked there.

G: That long? (F: Yes) And what did he do at Wang?

F: He is, he worked in the computers, and oh my God!

G: Was it manufacturing, or was?

F: A tester.

G: Oh a tester? (F: Yes) Okay.

F: He was a tester there.

G: So quality control kind of work.

F: Quality control, yes.

G: Okay.

F: And after, he worked there for eight years I believe, eight or nine years. And he went to this place. He was laid off for a while because Wang went down. They started laying off people with money. He was the lucky one to get the money. So he got laid off and he went to this Bradford Industries. He's been working there for fifteen years now. (G: Okay. Umhm) That's the last job that he, that he try. [Laughs]

G: Now when you first came to Lowell to join your husband where did you live?

F: I live in Lowell.

G: In what part of Lowell?

F: In Vernon Street, up in uh, Mt. Vernon, up there. I loved there. It was very nice, very quiet, very good neighborhood.

G: What was your house like there?

F: Very small. It was a very small apartment. It was just a kitchen, yes, it was the (--)
The kitchen was a big kitchen, and the bedroom and the bathroom, that's it. And after when we start getting kids, my first kid Deborah, Deborah was born in '74. And we stayed there for a year, but the apartment was really small. We moved to Concord Street, to a bigger apartment, because I was pregnant for Richard, my second one. He was born in '75. And we lived there for quite some time. And in '74 I went to work at Lowell Lingerie when I was pregnant for my daughter. I was working in the office there. I was a clerk typist, (G: Okay) but I was not making money. It was \$2.00 an hour. Oh my God, \$2.00 an hour. And I was working there, but I didn't like the job. Oh my God! They had, in the office they had the big, big window of course, because they wanted to be seeing the people that were working there. All the women they were Greek, Greek, most

of them they were Greek, and they were working like lions. Oh my God they were working all the time. And I came from a place that people were just working. It was not, it was not piece work there. In the base we just worked like, ah, it was beautiful. It was like a family. I loved that.

G: Yes. So the pace was much faster here than there?

F: Oh my God, I got there and the people were screaming with the women. They couldn't, they were working, but they were stitching all the time you know, the machines. If they look up to look around, the supervisor will scream at them! And I was so nervous, and I was pregnant for my, my Deborah, and I think that made me feel so sick, and I started throwing up. And I was very, very sick, very nervous. I didn't like to see that. I said, oh my, it looks like white slavery. They talk about slavery, my God, because people were on piecework. They couldn't move. They couldn't do anything. That was a tremendous experience for me. Oh my God, I was so sick to see that. Oh, it was terrible.

G: And it was mostly Greek women working there?

F: Yes.

G: What about the people who were managing the place?

F: Well the managers, I didn't have contact with them, (G: Yah) because they were people that, you are here, and I am there. So don't bother me, you know, that kind of people that you don't talk to them. They don't even say nothing to you when they go by you. They don't say hi or anything.

G: Were they also Greeks who ran the business?

F: Most of them, they were Jewish. They were Jews.

G: Umhm. Umhm. Do you remember their name?

F: No, it was so long ago I don't remember.

G: And was it a union, or non-union operation?

F: It was a non-union operation.

G: But mostly women working there.

F: Just women.

G: And male supervisors?

F: Male supervisors, and that man screamed I'm telling you. Oh!

G: Now you took that job not too long after you first came to Lowell, yes?

F: Yes. It was about let's see, about six months. (G: Okay) After I was in Lowell a friend of mine got me that job.

G: Okay, and that was your first job in Lowell?

F: It was my first job in Lowell. I was there. I was there for the year.

G: One year!

F: One year, and I asked for a lay-off. They didn't give me lay-off. I asked for lay-off because I was getting very, very sick and with my baby and everything. I didn't know what was wrong then. So I asked them to give me lay-off. So I went for a lay-off and I was making \$40.00 a week. Oh boy!

G: So you had your child then?

F: I had my child then, and after I was pregnant for my second child. That's in '75 I had my child. And I had another friend of mine, a Portuguese girl, her name is Honoria. She was a very, very good friend. And she was working for Joan's Fabric. She was a weaver there. And she talked with her boss, in that time it was Joe Mandazi. He was the nicest person that I ever met in my life. He passed a way. I feel, I'm sorry. [Francisca is a little emotional] He was a very good man, very, he was the best! The best! And he knew that I needed a job. So I went there and um, oh excuse me, I can't talk about him.

G: That's okay. Was he a Portuguese man?

F: No, he was Italian. He was an American.

G: Italian American.

F: Yes, but he was that kind of person that you talk to him, and you, you trust that person. He was the best man, the best boss that I ever had.

G: Oh that's wonderful. Now actually before I wanted to ask you about your initial experience when you first came to Lowell. What did you, what did you think of Lowell when you first arrived?

F: Oh my God! When I came to Lowell (--)

K: What time of year was it?

F: It was in August, the August, 23rd of August, '73. And that was when I came to Lowell I was thinking that I was going to be in a place that like they have in the movies.

So America for me was that beautiful place where you have a garden outside, and you have everything, it's beautiful! So I came to Lowell, and Lowell was terrible. It was not, it was an industrial city, but very old, very ugly, very dirty. The most thing that shocked me was very dirty. I came from a place that everything is so clean, and it was very dirty. It was people outside on the streets drinking beer outside the house. I said, "Oh my God what's this?" It was a shock. I was so disappointed. I was crying all the time. I told my husband, "I want to go back. I want to go back. I don't want to be living in this place. And this is all bad, and I don't like these people, they are so rude," because they were rude. Because when you work with military they are the nicest people in the world, because they cannot, they have to go straight all the time. They can't turn around. They cannot say anything to you even if they want to. So these people were so rude in the streets and everything. I said, "Oh my God, I want to go back to my place." It was bad. (G: Yes) It was very bad.

G: Now of course you came here speaking English. (F: Yes) So language was not such a problem.

F: No, it was not bad. It was not bad, because I could understand the people. It was better than most of the people that came over here, they don't know nothing. But oh, but it was bad.

G: Yah. Do you remember the kind of people that lived in Mt. Vernon, that neighborhood where you, what sort of folks were they? Was it a mixed neighborhood?

F: No, no, no, it was most of the people were old people. (G: Hmm, really) Very nice people. (G: Uh huh) Very nice people. Very nice. They were old.

G: Retired perhaps?

F: Most of them were retired. Most of them were retired, and it was very quiet. I lived closed to the water, the, they have a water tank there. What do they call that?

G: A stand pipe?

F: Is that so?

G: I think that's the one you described. The water supply tank, yes?

F: That's the water supply, yes. (G: Yes) I lived right there. It was very nice. (G: Umhm) It was the best place that I, that I loved to live, it was there.

G: Now did you get a sense that it was mixed nationalities of Greeks, and French, and Irish, or was it mostly Portuguese?

F: No, no, it was, they were all American. I was the only Portuguese there.

G: Okay. Okay.

F: I was the only Portuguese there, but I was getting along with them because they are old people, and I have no kids at the time. So everything was fine.

G: And do you remember coming downtown and shopping downtown?

F: Yes, most of the times I came down, especially after I had my baby I would come down Lowell and walk around. I loved to walk around and see the stores and it was nice. It was nice.

G: Now was that neighborhood around Back Central largely Portuguese, do you recall? Back Central?

F: Back Central, yes.

G: Did you spend much time there?

F: They were all Portuguese back there.

G: Did you spend much time there in the shops and socializing?

F: No, no, it was almost the same. Yah, just passing by and buying some stuff and talking a little bit, but not much. But I love to talk, so. [Chuckles]

G: Did you attend St. Anthony's Church?

F: Yes we did, yes.

G: Okay. Uh huh. That was your parish?

F: And we still, we still do, yah (G: Okay. Uh huh) that's St. Anthony's.

G: So right away you started going to St. Anthony's?

F: Yes, and I have all my kids baptized, and all that.

G: Uh huh. And did you make friends within the Portuguese community in Lowell, or did you make friends from outside the Portuguese?

F: We have friends we had from Peabody. We have friends in New Hampshire, some of them. We have friends in New Bedford. We have friends all over, in Methuen. (G: Yesh) Yah, we have friends all over.

G: But when you said when you came to Lowell it was, it was difficult initially.

F: It was very, very difficult.

G: Having a large Portuguese community here, did that help you at all as far as adjusting to life in Lowell?

F: Well, well not to me. (G: No?) No, because my husband is not the outgoing person. He's one, he likes to stay home most of the times. So we didn't went to the feast and meet people like the Holy Ghost, and no, we didn't go, we were very, very to ourselves.

G: Okay, okay. I see. Okay. But occasionally you would meet other people maybe even from your same town here in Lowell?

F: No, no, (G: Oh no?) because most of the people from Terleira, where I came from and my husband, they are going to California.

G: Really? Okay.

F: Yes. They go to California for, because they are farmers. So over here these people from another island that's called [Graciosa], most of the people. So we didn't know most of them we don't know them. So. So if we meet we talk and so, but not getting close friends.

G: Yes. But now your friends who got you the job at Joan Fabrics, (F: Yes) now who was she?

F: Yes, she's from Terleira, but from Lajes, from another city. [G: Umhm] But she's, she's still my friend today. She's a very good person.

G: Did you know her before you came to Lowell?

F: No, no, I didn't.

G: So you met her here?

F: I met her in my brother-in-law house. They were friends. (G: Uh huh) And I was talking to her about my job, that I didn't like it, and I was getting laid-off because I don't like the job. I don't like the (--) She said, "Oh, I'm going to talk with Joe, (G: Yes) and maybe I can do something about that. (G: Right) So he got me the job right away.

G: Okay. And what was your job at that time?

F: I start as a weaver. (G: Umhm. Umhm) And ah, that was terrible, because I never seen a weave, a loom in my life! I look at that loom and I was just, I couldn't talk. I just start crying. I said, "Honorina, I can't work on this thing. I never seen one in my life." She said, "Me too, you get used to that." [Laughs]

G: Was it noisy?

F: Very noisy. We were doing furniture, (G: Upholstery) upholstery. (G: Umhm) And we had to take, it was um, ah, that looms were so different. And we have to do everything. The weaver has to cut the rolls and everything. And for me, because I'm a short, a short person and small, oh my God! I just cried and cried, and I said, "I can't do it." But they were paying \$3.00 an hour. So for me it was, another \$1.00 an hour was a lot at that time, and I had my two kids. So I said, "I have to stay with this. I have to be here. I have to keep the job," but it was very hard, very hard for me to learn that job.

G: And did you say you started working there before you had Richard, or after?

F: After I had my Richard. It was in 1976 (G: Okay, okay) when I came to Joan's, 1976.

G: So you had two children and he was what, one year old about when you started?

F: Not even. My little, Deborah was one year old, and he was about, about six months.

G: And what shift were you working when you started?

F: I start working first shift, and after, because she was training me. And after six weeks, I believe I stayed with her six weeks, I went to second shift by myself.

G: Now did your friend actually train you in the job as well? (F: Yes) Oh she did.

F: Yes, she was the one who trained me.

G: Oh okay.

F: Yes, I was trained for six weeks, I believe it was six weeks, then after I went to the second shift.

G: Now what was the first shift, what were those hours?

F: Was six to two.

G: Six in the morning until two. And what did you do about childcare while you were at work?

F: Well I had to get a babysitter. A friend of mine, her mother-in-law was the one who took care of my kids while I was working.

G: Okay, and you obviously had to pay for the babysitter.

F: Yes, \$30.00 a week.

G: I see. I see.

F: Now it's a hundred, but that time was \$30.00 a week, I was making a \$100.00. So.

G: Now what was that loom like that you were trained on? Was it a rapier loom?

F: It was a rapier loom.

G: It was a rapier loom.

F: It was a rapier loom, and it was very easy. That one, compared with the other ones that I came later on to work with, that ones were very easy. (G: I see. I see) But for me it was the end of the world because I never seen one before.

G: Okay. And how many looms were you expected to operate?

F: Five. We operate five looms. (G: Five looms) Five looms, and we have to do everything. We have to cut the rolls, and mostly, and patrol the machines of course. (G: And tie knots too) And tie knots, but they were very easy, because they were not that kind, they were yarn and yarn doesn't break as easy as the other, like silk or something like that.

G: Okay. This is actually a synthetic yarn?

F: Synthetic yarn.

G: Okay. Yes. Hm. Now were there loom fixers that were there?

F: One loom fixer for twenty-five machines.

G: Okay. So were you working in a room that had overall twenty-five looms?

F: Twenty-five machines yah, twenty-five looms together.

G: And there would have been five weavers.

F: Yes, five looms for one weaver.

G: And were they all women?

F: At the time there were three women and two men.

G: Uh huh, okay. Were they all from the Azores, or?

F: No, no, no. I was the only one from the Azores.

G: And your friend too, right?

F: And my friend. It was me and my friend, (G: Ah huh) and another girl from the other Island. It was three girls from the Island. And there were two Spanish men. (G: Puerto Rican men?) Puerto Rican men, they are working there.

G: Okay. Ah huh. And did they speak English as well as Spanish?

F: Not, not, not too well. No. We understand them, but not too well.

G: I see. Okay.

F: Yah, but they were doing their job good.

G: What about the loom fixer?

F: The loom fixer, he was a man from Spain and his name was Casanova. He still works at Joan's

G: Ah huh.

F: He was still working when I left. He already retired, but he came back to work just part-time. He loves money. That man loves money. Oh, he won't give up for nothing. His name is John Casanova, and he was the loom fixer at the time.

G: Was he a pretty skilled man?

F: Yes. Yes, very, very.

G: Umhm. And what was your work relationship like with all the people that worked there?

F: I always got along with everybody. (G: Uh huh. Uh huh) I never had problems with anybody, anybody.

G: And you mentioned that the two Puerto Rican men were also very hard working?

F: Yes. (G: Yes) Everybody was, we have to because we were on piecework.

G: Uh huh, okay.

F: And you have to be on top of the machines all the time. That looms there, they can't stop, (G: Okay) because if they stop for a long time you lose.

G: Now you said you were on piecework.

F: On piecework, \$3.00 an hour plus if you make some money on your machines. (G: I see. Okay) So I could make \$5.00 or \$5.50, it was the end of the world. [Laughs] It was too much money.

G: So you were given a base salary, base rate.

F: A base salary, yes.

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

G: Now you were saying that you were working these rapier looms.

F: Yes.

G: And what I wanted to ask you was, when you're given a base wage of \$3.00 per hour, but what did it require for you to make additional money? You said it was, you had to produce more, but how did that work? Tell me about that?

F: Well what you have to do is work very fast. You have to be fast. And you cannot leave the looms for a long time, and the best you can do is if you go to the bathroom you leave somebody there. You can ask the fixer to be there, so you won't lose money. You can go, (G: I see) but you're going to lose money if the machine stops for one or two or three minutes, you know. The minutes are money.

G: I see. And why would the machine stop? What would cause the machine to stop?

F: Most of the time it was the rapiers. The yarn that was in the combs. Sometimes it was not very, very good yarn, and the rapier would break.

G: Okay. Okay. So the filling thread would break?

F: It would break.

G: What about the warp threads, did they break on occasion?

F: Occasionally, but not often.

G: Okay, it was mainly the rapier?

F: The rapier was, the most problems we had was the rapiers.

G: So you had to really stay on top of that?

F: Yes, because most of the time people were fighting because of the money they were making. If the fixer spends too much time in one loom, and the other loom needs to be fixed, they would be yelling and screaming at Casanova for example. He has to go there in the minute. Sometimes they can't go fast, because they have a problem it takes time to fix the machine. It takes time. So they would lose money on the machine.

G: So there was a lot of competition for his time.

F: A lot of competition. And a lot of competition before first shift, third shift, second shift, because you made more money than I did, and the machines run better for you than they run for me. Somebody helped you, and all that kind of stuff. I never had that problem. He's still alive. Anybody can ask him, I never had that problem. I don't bother with these things. That is, things more important in life than fighting about money.

G: Now were you wearing hearing protection at that time?

F: Yes, all the time. All the time.

G: But it still was very loud even with the protection.

F: Very loud.

G: And how did you get used to the noise?

F: We just got used to the noise. I don't understand how, but we do. After a couple of months we forget. We just put your earplugs, put them in, that's it, and you forget all about the noise, and you talk and everything. The funny thing is, you are in your machines and you have five looms running, and if one stops you know that one of your looms are stopped. I don't know how, but we do. We are looking in front. In the back we have one that says, "Ah, wait a minute, my loom stopped." And it is. And the loom is stopped.

G: So you could actually hear in the back when the loom had stopped.

F: Hear yah, in a way, yes. That's funny, but that happens after a long time. Not in the beginning, but after a couple of months, years of experience you can learn that.

G: How long did it take you before you got comfortable as a weaver?

F: Oh it take me a long time. A long time, especially in that first job that I had, it was hard, very hard. It was a very hard job, because you have to do everything. Later on, I think a year later, or year and a half later they hired a man to cut the rolls. So he was just there for when we need him he would come over and cut the roll, because it was too much. Especially for women, doing that job was very hard job.

G: Okay. And what, tell me about that job. How did you handle the rolls? How did you use those with the weaving?

F: Oh my god. When the, we had the big roll okay, the machine will stop, automatically would stop. And we had to pull a big bar with the weight of the roll in, pull it out.

G: You're describing the warp beam, correct? (F: Yah, the) This is the warp, this is the warp.

F: No, not the warp beam. The beam under the machine, the one that wraps the [draw], (K: The take-up) the take-up.

G: The take-up, I see. Okay.

F: It would be full, about maybe three hundred, four hundred yards there, and we have to cut it out, pull in the side, put another bar in (G: Got yah) and wrap it in. It was too much. (G: Okay) It was too hard for women to do it.

G: How long could the loom run before the take-up was full?

F: Sometimes three, four hours.

G: Okay.

K: Wow.

G: So in the course of one shift you might have to deal with about, well five.

F: About five, five take-ups.

G: Of the take-up of the rolls. (F: Of the rolls) And it sounds like it was very physically demanding work.

F: Oh my God! It was very, very (--) I used to come home and I had pains all over my back, my arms. I said, "Oh my God, it looks like somebody was beating me with a bat." I was so tired!

G: Because they were so far down you also had to stoop and bend way down.

F: Bend, and I couldn't pick them up. Some women, they had a woman there, Elena, she was big and strong and she could do it. She could just pull that thing down. And I look at her and say, "I wish I was like that." [Laughs] Because I struggle with mine back and forth to take it out! Oh my God it was hard.

G: And of course when the loom isn't running you're not making money.

F: No. No. But I had, most of the time that I was in trouble I had that man, Casanova would come over and help me. (G: He would) He would help me. He didn't help the others though. He didn't like the other women. I don't know why, but he didn't like them. They were jealous because he would come over here, over to me. I said, "Well I'm always quiet, maybe that's why he's coming to my side to help me."

G: Wow, interesting. So you had a very good relationship with Casanova?

F: I had, yes, with everybody. With everybody.

G: Now you said they finally hired somebody, a man who handle the, who did the cutting as well?

F: Yes. (G: Okay) After that we didn't have to do it no more. Just take care of the machines and patrol the looms, and that's it.

G: And how long had you been there before they hired this man?

F: About a year and a half.

G: Okay. Okay. (F: It was a long time) Uh huh. Now when you first, when you first started at Joan and you came to that plant, they just opened it up for the first time?

F: No, it was there (G: Okay) for a couple of years, (G: Okay) maybe two or three years before I went there. (G: Okay) They had people working there before.

G: Okay. So the plant was not that old.

F: No, no, no. No, it was not that old.

G: And the looms, were the looms fairly new?

F: Yes, (G: Okay) oh yes.

G: Do you remember what kind of looms they were, what kind of rapiers? Were they European manufactured?

F: They were German.

G: A German Company.

F: A German Company.

G: Okay, uh huh.

F: Yah, I don't remember the name, but I knew they were German, because when they were (--) Because after all, after a couple of months that I'd been there they had new machines coming over. And they had German, they had German people, three, yes, three engineers were there fixing the machines and putting them together, and teaching Casanova to do this and that and they were working around them. So they were German.

G: So they actually brought in fairly, they brought in new looms (F: Uh huh) even from the time you were there.

F: Yes, yes, about two or three looms. They brought them in.

G: Okay. So they didn't replace all the looms. They just brought in a few new ones.

F: Yes, just a few of them.

G: Okay. Did you work on that newer loom too?

F: No, they were for another weaver. (G: Okay) Yah, a different weaver.

G: Now how long did you stay in that job?

F: Oh I think three years on second shift, because after I went to second shift. Yes, three years. When they start fixing the, this block over here on Jackson Street, Joe Mandazi, he was my boss at the time. He told me, "When I go there you're going to be the first one to go with me." So when we moved here it was nine to five, because it was just two machines. They have, yah, they had two looms, one fixer and they were training another fixer. He was Spencer. Spencer Hayes was his name, Spencer Hayes. They were training that guy. And it was Joe in the office, and a knot tier, and a starter man. Just six people there.

G: Starting at Jackson Street?

F: Yes, starting in Jackson Street.

G: Uh huh. Now were you using rapier looms at Jackson Street?

F: Yes, rapier loom, they were French, they were from France.

G: Oh, okay. Brand new looms.

F: Brand new looms, all brand new, all of them. (G: Okay) They start with two, and after they went little by little, you know, start (--)

G: So they'd see how they were working (F: Yes) and then they would order more.

F: And they, they order all the other looms.

G: Okay. And eventually did everybody transfer over from?

F: Yes, all of them. They start calling (--). They got laid off, and after they start calling all of them.

G: Calling them back to work again at Jackson Street.

F: Get back to work at Jackson Street.

G: Now let me ask you, do you remember Harold Ansin? Mr. Ansin who was the head of Joan Fabrics?

F: The son, I remember the son, yes.

G: Which now, was that Larry or Joe?

F: Um, Larry. Larry. He was nice. He was very nice. Every time he go there he would come around and talk to us. He was very friendly. He was a nice man. He was a nice man.

G: Do you remember his father though, who actually had the business beforehand?

F: Yes. Yes. He used to come around too. Not as often as Larry. Larry was more outgoing. (G: Okay) Yah, outgoing person, but I remember him, yes.

G: And do you remember his brother Joe? (F: Yes) Okay, you probably didn't see him as much. (F: No, no.) Okay.

F: Larry was around the loom more often. I don't know why, maybe he liked it, I don't know.

G: [Chuckles] And did you get a sense that it was a family business?

F: Yes. Yes, we could see that. (G: Yes) Yah. (G: Okay, now) Especially Larry, he was always, most of the times, he went there a lot of times, a lot of times.

G: Okay. Did he know your name for example?

F: Yes. He would come around and say, "Hey Francisca, how are you doing?" (G: I see) He was nice. He was very nice.

G: Yah. Now did you get Christmas bonuses or anything like that do you remember?

F: No. No. Never. Never.

G: A turkey at Christmas?

F: At uh, they started giving turkeys away on um, about let's see, maybe seven or eight years ago, but not before. We didn't have anything.

G: Okay.

F: They don't give you bonus, or never, nothing, nothing, nothing.

G: Did you get a, did you have a, did you get a raise during the first few years you were there?

F: Yes, every year.

G: You got a raise every year.

F: Every year. (G: Okay) Three percent, five percent, four percent, it depends on the business, and how much they decide to give. I don't think it's the business. It's how much they want to give.

G: Yes, okay.

F: Because they're doing good.

G: Now when you went over to Jackson Street was it the same job, or did you have a different job?

F: No, I went as a weaver. (G: Okay) To be trained in another kind of loom. They were rapiers, but they were electric. They were different from the other ones. (G: Okay, uh huh) These ones were, you just touch buttons and there they go.

G: How did that compare with the other ones?

F: Uh, they were a lot different and very tall. They were tall. Oh my God! That machines were so, so high they had to put a platform so we can work on it. [Laughs]

G: I see. So these were smaller and more compact machines.

F: The ones that I had before, they are a little bigger than the ones you have downstairs, (G: Okay) but they were not too big. (G: Okay) But his one, they were huge! And they had, in the back they had three beams. (G: Three beams) Three beams. (G: Okay) They had one, two on the bottom, yes, two for the bottom and one for the, the pile beam. One pile beam, two back. (G: Oh okay. Ah huh) Oh my God, they were huge, huge, huge machines!

G: Okay, and these, these were the French machines.

F: The French, yes.

G: Yes. So was it quite an adjustment working on these new, much larger looms?

F: Yes, and they were different because they had about six to eight harnesses. (G: Umhm) And the ones that I used to work, they had three. (G: Okay) It's like the ones downstairs, (G: I see) you know. (G: Ah huh) Three, four the maximum, (G: Yes) and this one were six and eight. (G: Okay) So you have to learn by the harnesses where you have the back, the top, the bottom, the pile, where they go to make the design. So it was much harder to learn that.

G: Were they more work to operate as well?

F: Yes, yes, but easier.

G: How so? How were they easier?

F: They're easier because most of the times you don't have to do nothing. (G: Uh huh) You just have to patrol the machine very, very well. You have to patrol because they are a lot faster. So you have to go quicker back and forth, and you have to be, how much machines, how many? It was eight.

G: So you had to tend to eight looms?

F: Yes, we have eight, eight looms (G: Instead of five) instead of five. (G: Okay) And they were, they were easier, but harder if they break, if they have smashes they were much, much harder to fix. And most of the times we have to do it, because they have one smash piecer for all that weave room. It was about forty machines they had at the time, yah, forty machines. So it's, it's a lot, and it was harder.

G: So you still had five weavers tending (F: Yes, all the time) each of them eight looms.

F: For each, for five looms you know, we still had five weavers and the three shifts.

G: Yes.

F: They had the three shifts running all the time.

G: Now were you paid more money because you were operating more looms?

F: I started making \$10.00 an hour when I came here to this place. I believe it was because it was more machines to run, more looms, or because they just decided to give the \$10.00 an hour. I don't know. I don't understand because they never explain anything. They just say, "That's what you're going to make." And that's it.

G: So you were paid a flat wage as opposed to piecework?

F: Yes. Yes. And after you have, you still have on that plant over there, the piecework.

G: Oh, so there's still work, (F: Oh yes) still piecework too.

F: He's still on piecework. (G: Okay) Some people were making, I never made that much, but, because I am one person that I'm worried about quality. And because I worry too much about quality, anything I see in a machine, I don't make as much money. So the maximum I made was \$12.00, \$13.00. I never go, I never went over, but my friends there, oh yes, \$17.00 an hour and more they were making.

K: And what year is that they were making that?

F: Oh I've been there maybe 1996, 94, 95 when I was a weaver there before I was transferred to the knitting department.

G: So, but when they first installed those looms, that was you said in 1976 or so?

F: 1976, (G: Okay) when they, when I came to this.

G: Okay. Yes. So, but when you first started working there at 76, and again you were operating eventually eight looms, (F: Yes) do you remember how much you were paid at that time?

F: Yah, \$10.00.

G: Oh okay, it was \$10.00.

F: It was at \$10.00 an hour they gave it to me. (G: So that was a big) When you, when you start working, when you're learning, they give you \$8.00 an hour. And when you have the machines, all the looms for yourself, when you take care of the looms for yourself they give you \$10.00 and hour, plus how much you make. You can make \$10.00, \$11.00, \$12.00, \$14.00, \$15.00, it depends on if the looms are running good or bad.

G: Did you prefer the new plant to the old plant?

F: Oh yes, it was much better.

G: How was it better?

F: Oh, it was cleaner, it was prettier, we had a lot of light. Oh, it was much better to work in that plant, oh yes.

G: What were the safety conditions like in both places?

F: Safety, hm. Well we have to wear the ear protection all the time. They don't want oil on the floor. We have to be careful with our hands while operating. We have to be very careful, because most of, I have two friends that lost the fingers there. Thank God that never happened to me, but sometimes it happens.

G: Was this at Jackson Street?

F: Jackson Street.

G: They did lose fingers. (F: Yes) With the looms.

F: With the looms. With the rapiers. They came too fast and they just got stuck. One was a fixer.

G: One was a fixer. Yah. Did you have little bumps and bruises? You said you, with the rolls you felt sore.

F: Sore in the other plant, (G: In the other plant) not this one. (G: I see) In this one we didn't have to do anything. (G: Okay) Just put the cones and the quill. We have to fill the quill all the time for the rapier. (G: Yes) But we didn't have to take the rolls, or do anything else. No, no, just patrol the loom and fix, we had a lot of fixing to do because the yarn was a different kind of yarn. So it was not as good as the other kind. But that was a job. It was nice. It was not bad. We had lots of silk yarn looms.

G: Now did you, did you enjoy your work there?

F: Yes, it was not bad. It was a good, I liked the job. I liked the people that I worked with, and I liked the supervisor. He was the best. And at the time we had the boss, he was a Chairman. Oh, Ralph [Ferbbers], Ralph Ferbers, he was a very nice boss. Very nice, very friendly.

G: He was Joe's boss as well?

F: Yes. (G: Okay) He was one of the big ones. (G: Okay. Uh huh) And he was very kind, very nice. He used to come down in the machines and talk to us, and see if something was wrong, and if we need something. And he was very nice, very nice person. But along the years a lot of people went and came, and went again. So.

G: Was there a high turnover?

F: Yes. (G: There was) And most of the people that came to work after Ralph [Ferbbers], they were snobby. So, they didn't talk to nobody. They don't say, "Hi." They don't look at you. So we feel like kind of cold. We don't feel like working anymore. We just look at the looms, "Oh, here I am again for another day. Oh boy I wish I was home." Yah, we don't feel as nice as before.

G: So this turnover was more so with management you're saying.

F: Yes, for management, yes. And everything started going wrong, because they have new ideas, and they're working with computers. That's what I think. And the computers, that's very nice, but you are working with people and people are the ones, they know what's going on in the looms, not the computer. The computer gives you the idea, but there is, it doesn't have the knowledge that the person that is working with the looms knows. It doesn't matter if he's the weaver, if he's the fixer, they're not tired, we know what's going on with a machine. We even know why this has happened, or that has happened. Sometimes we cannot fix, but we know what that loom is doing. And they have all figured out in a computer, and it's not doing the same thing. It's the opposite. They came to us and they yell and scream because something is going on wrong, because we are not doing this and this. It's not so. If you come down from your high horses, and come down and talk with the people and you know, talk to us, to any, not me but anybody, they would know what's going on, but they don't.

G: So there was greater distance between (F: Yes!) the managers and their knowledge (F: Yes!) of what's happened on the shop floor.

F: Yes. They don't, they don't care. I believe for a couple of years until Joan shut down the weave room. Yah, '96. People were machines working with all the machines. So they don't care who is there. They don't care for how long you're there, because they know, but you don't. (G: Right. Right) So when they start like that everything is going down.

G: And when did that change occur? Do you remember when did that change in relationship occur?

F: Oh, about in the 90's.

G: In the 90's?

F: 90's, when everybody starts coming, new bosses, new management. They start doing, this person knows what he's doing. He's going to do this, and he's going to do that.

G: I see. I see.

F: They didn't know enough about the weave room, and about how to run that machine, how to run the whole shifts, and they didn't. They didn't know how to do that. Maybe they were very good at what they were doing, okay, but not there with us. They didn't know how to work with people.

G: Did your colleagues who worked with you on the shop floor start looking for other jobs, or (--)

F: Everybody was disappointed. Everybody start saying, "Oh, we're going here." That's when they started moving to Malden Mills, (G: Uh huh) because Malden Mills was promising a lot of things. So like Joe Pais and Maria Pais, so they move. That's the ones I know best, they moved. (G: Yes) And they were working at Malden Mills for, I think the maximum was two years, and they came back.

G: Why did they come back?

F: Well they came back because even with all of these defects that they were putting together, it was better working at Joan's.

G: Why is that?

F: Better because we were treating the way they said, we were treating better, they were treating us better than Malden Mills was treating them there. (G: Really) That's what they said. I don't know because I never went to Malden. They wanted me to got there (G: Yah) and I said, "No, because over here I already have my vacation. I know the people. I know what I'm doing." And I'm not the person that likes to jump from here and there. When I'm, I'm happy in one place, I stay. No matter what happens around me, I may not like it, but I'm trying to do my job and try, there people don't bother me. I they don't bother me it's fine, I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing. And they told me, "No Francisca, come back, this is good. They pay a little more." But they had ten machines, ten, ten at the Malden Mills.

G: And weren't they working longer hours too? Were they working longer?

F: They were working twelve hours. (G: Yes) And they were working the shift, the rotating shifts. It was twelve hours, and one week they worked forty something hours, the other was thirty something hours. You know, they do their rotation. (G: Right, right) And I don't like that. I don't like that. So I said, "Okay, I'm going to stay here." About two years later they come back. They said, "Oh Francisca you were right. I don't know why, but you were right not moving, because we cannot have a coffee, we cannot go to the bathroom, we cannot (--)" I said, "Uh huh, I told you." Because after all of these things we had supervisors, they were not too bad. Most of them, they were not doing much, but didn't want to be bothered. So if we were going to get a coffee, they just close their eyes because they don't want to pay attention, because they don't want to be bothered. So we, they used to call me Norma Rae. Joe Mandazi used to call me Norma Rae, because everything that happened he had to start with me. Maybe because I was the oldest in everything, in the company and in age, I was older than anybody else. So anything that happened they come to me. "Francisca what are we going to do?" "Francisca, they are doing this, what are we going to do?" I said, "Oh my God, we have no union. We don't have a union." They don't want a union there. So I says, "Well what we can do, if something happens," like one thing happened before. Oh well it's a funny one. We were working forty hours okay, like any other place. And they told us that we have to work Saturdays. We have to. I said, "Okay, we have to if we can do it, because some people cannot do it. They have small children. They cannot work

Saturdays. Most of the mothers they don't have babysitter. They have to stay home." So one day they came, they start giving slips. For the people that don't work Saturdays they were having warning slips. And they came to me of course. "Hey Francisca, what are we going to do? Because I just have this slip and I can't work, and I don't (--)" I said, "I'm not the supervisor, so what can I do?" "Oh you, you have the right ideas and you can do this, you can do that." I said, "Okay." What we did, it was crazy then, but when I think about something I just don't think too much. And I said, "Stop all the looms. Stop all the looms." And you got to stop, because most of them they don't know English, so they didn't know what was going on. But they respect me. And if I say something, even for the older people that were there, I was right. Because I used to translate for them, and go to the office with them, and talk to the bosses about this or that, so they respect me. So I told them, "Stop it." And they stopped because I said so. And there was a silence. Oh my God, forty looms stopped. So it was such a silence. The bosses came outside, the supervisors, "What's wrong, what's wrong?" "Hey, we have to talk about something. This and this and this has happened. They are giving slips for the people that don't work Saturdays, and I believe after forty hours you cannot make people work. They work if they want to, and if they can. If they cannot do it, they cannot do it." They sent a person from Tewksbury. We were all in the office and they sent a person to find out what was going on.

G: You mean in Tyngsboro.

F: In Tewksbury. (G: Yah) Because they didn't know what was going on. Why all that looms stopped, and what was going on in the office, because we all went in the office and we talked to the boss.

G: Who was that? Do you remember?

F: Jim Donovan. I believe now he's South someplace, Jim Donovan. And he came down and he said, "I know. I can see you." It's me. "I can see you right there. You are the one who stopped everything." I said, "This time I have to, because this and this and this." Because they had a new manager there, and he was the one that said that we had to do, they had to work like that, (G: Umhm) because they have too much work. And because it was the summertime, and they had too much work. People were skipping because they want to go to the beach and this, and they had (--)

Tape I ends
Tape II side A begins.

G: Now Joe Donovan came down (F: Jim Donovan came), Jim Donovan came down from Tyngsboro, or did you guys go?

F: No, he was working upstairs. They send a person, a female, a girl. I never saw her before. I think that she was some kind of secretary or something like that. She came down to find out what was going on. And they said, "Oh, everything is fine, no problem.

Go back to your work, and never, that is not going to ever happen again.” And they didn’t. Jim Donovan was the kind of person that nobody liked that man. He was rude. He was rude to people. But I can see, I start talking to him, and I understand that he was that kind of man that you couldn’t trust him, because he was a dictator. And he would go through hell to get his words straight so nobody would say, “Oh, he said that and he didn’t do it.” No. Even if he was wrong he was right. He was that kind of man. So after that we didn’t have no more problem. We started working, one person, needs to stay home another one would come over and work overtime. So we started working like that because that’s the way it should be done. Not making people like, “Hey you have to, you have to.” You don’t have to, because after forty hours if you come over and you work, but if you cannot do it somebody else will do it for you.

G: Now did you get overtime pay for Saturday work?

F: Yes.

G: Was it time and a half?

F: Time and a half, and most of the times, later on they had Sundays too. That was double time.

G: Now when was this Francisca? When did they actually go from this forty hours to forty hours plus Saturday. Do you remember, when was that? When did they make this statement that you had to work Saturdays?

F: It was about maybe ’93, or ’94. It was a couple of years before they shut down, because they had a lot of work they want to finish. (G: Yes) They had to give that work to the customers. (G: Okay) So they were, they really needed the people working, but they could come down and make a meeting once in awhile with us, because we like to know what’s going on. All of a sudden they came down they, “You do this, you do that.” Come on, hello, I’m here! I’m a person. I’m not a machine. But they don’t.

G: Now did Donovan work in Jackson Street, or did he have his office in Tyngsboro?

F: No, he worked in Jackson Street. (G: Okay, so he) He had his office, but he was one of the bosses.

G: Yah, okay. Now did you occasionally work Saturdays then after?

F: Yes, I worked a lot of Saturdays and I worked a lot of Sundays after, (G: Okay) because they were paying double, double time.

G: Double times on Sundays.

F: Yah, double time on Sundays. So I worked for a lot of, maybe six or seven months they worked like that.

G: So it sounds like they had a lot of orders coming in.

F: They had a lot, a lot of orders. I don't understand how can a company as strong as that one, because it was strong, they had a lot of orders, and all of a sudden they don't have no more orders. It's something very strange. And I believe that it was not from the people, because we were the same ones there all the time. They didn't change. They didn't have new people coming in. What they were changing all the time was management. They were changing over. A couple of months one man, a couple of months another man, another. That, that starts, everything starts going down when they were moving so much. Something was wrong with management. I don't know what it was.

G: Now at that time did you know Elkin McCallum?

F: Yes.

G: And what was, what did you think of him?

F: Well to tell you the truth, I loved that man. I really love that man. And I was so surprised when he left like that. He didn't even talk to us. Because in my heart, because I'd known him for so long, and he used to come down and talk to me, and say, "That's my oldest girl and you're going to be in a museum," because, and he liked to joke around with me. And I, I used to tell the girls, "He doesn't care about us." And I said, "No, he's going to take care of us. He's a good man. He's going to do it. He's going to take care of us." So I always thought in my heart that through to the end he would come over and talk to us, and even a talk. He don't need to give us anything, but to say I'm sorry but that happened, and so and so. I think that's what that man should have done. I don't know, but in my heart it was very hurt, because I expect him to do something for us. He didn't give it. He didn't even show up. He didn't say nothing.

G: Now, and of course you remember him going back to the 1970's right? (F: Yes) Did you first meet him back when?

F: I met him about 1980, 1986 or 87. (G: Okay) It was after Larry passed away. That's when he (G: And Elkin took over) took over, and he start coming down. Sometimes twice a year he would come over and look around the weave room, and say hi, and talk to us. It was nice. It was nice. And after he, after that, about five, five or six years before they shut down, it was in the 90's, '91, he had the breakfast. He called all the employees and he had the breakfast in December. Like he had extra money like that, they used to say. And we all get together and have breakfast, and he was so nice. And he could talk, and we could talk. And give our opinion about, they didn't pay attention anyway, but we could say this or that was wrong, or was right, you know. It was nice.

G: Where was the breakfast held?

F: On the Sheraton downtown. And he was very nice. I think he was the best. He was very nice.

G: Was it for all employees?

F: No, after fifteen years. You have to be there fifteen years. After the fifteen you were invited to the breakfast.

G: And it was once a year they would have the breakfast.

F: Once a year. Yah. It was very nice.

G: So you had a good relationship with Elkin McCallum?

F: Elkin, yes, and I would like to talk to him. Oh I would love to talk to him, because I think what he did was bad.

G: This is later on when they, when he sold the company to Collins & Aikman. (F: Yes) Before we get to that though I want to ask you a couple of more things. (F: Yes) You mentioned that there was no union at Joan Fabrics. (F: No union) And was there ever any encouragement to have a union with other workers?

F: They came to my house.

G: Uh huh. Who came?

F: The union. Two ladies. Oh my God I don't remember their names. It was in 1984, or '85, '84, I had my last kid. I had Elizabeth. I was home with Elizabeth. Yes, '84, two ladies from the union they came back to my house and they asked me if I want to be a leader. (G: Umhm) And I never told them. And I said no.

G: You never told who that?

F: I never told the people in the company. (G: Oh) Because most of them I could listen to conversations, and most of them they didn't want the union. They didn't want to pay for, they didn't want to, because we were that people (--) And even for me, I told the lady there, even for me I like to talk with the supervisor. And if something is not good I will go with the supervisor to the boss, and I will talk to them but I can see their faces. I don't want people talking for me. I want to see them and see their reaction. And if they're doing, what kind of answer I'm going to have. So I don't like people telling me they said that, or they're going to do this, or they're going to do that. I like to talk to the person. So that day I told the lady I was not interested in being a leader, and it was too much responsibility, because it's not easy, especially when you have a company that you have Spanish, and Portuguese, and Greeks, it's a diversity. It's one think one way, the other think the other, the other think the other. It's very hard. So I said, I don't want, I don't want no part of that, but they came to my house once.

G: I wonder, how did they hear about you? Do you have any idea?

F: I have no idea. They told me, what the ladies told me that somebody in the company told them that I would be a very good leader, (G: Yes) for them to come to my house, they gave the address and everything to come to my house and talk to me, because I would be very good at that.

G: Like Norma Rae.

F: Like Norma Ray. Joe would call me Norma Rae all the time. "Oh Norma Ray, get out of my office!" [Laughs]

G: Did you ever see the movie Norma Rae?

F: Yes, and I was there. [Laughs] Yes.

G: Now was there also in, at Joan, was there a discouragement to not be in the union? Were there ever any notices put up, or anything?

F: No. No. (G: No) Nothing that I see that I know of, no. No, they just didn't have it. They didn't want it. They didn't want union at all there.

G: Yah, but you didn't hear them actively discouraging the union, did you, among the management?

F: No. No, they don't even talk about it. They never talk about it, never. Never heard that union in there. We never heard of that, no.

G: Among other workers?

F: Among the workers, sometimes. (G: Sometimes) Sometimes they talk, I wish, one or two, we wish we had union, they couldn't do this or they couldn't do that to us and all that, but they were going by seniority. One thing they went all the time. You have seniority, they go by your seniority. You go do this, you go there. The only thing they didn't do it was when they had other jobs openings, they never told us. It was never a post there so we could if you wanted to move, if we want to make more money, if you want to do a better job. If they were the jobs they didn't tell nobody. If we say something, "Oh, you don't care about that. You don't care, you're making a lot of money. Oh you're doing good."

G: Now you said you had two more kids while working at Joan?

F: Yes, I had Sonya.

G: When did you have her?

F: '79. I have her in '79, and it was very nice. I had a supervisor then. Oh I had so many supervisors. Some of them I don't remember the names. His name was Mike Pray. He was a wonderful man, a wonderful person. He was a lady's man, but with me, no problem. I don't care, but he was very, very good looking and he was all, oh he was a nice, but he was nice. And when I had Sonya they didn't give you time to stay home with your kids. You just have the baby, you stay home two weeks and you come back to work. That's it. Sometimes one week. It depends if you have the, they give you three weeks. If you take that time before the baby, you don't have the time after. So I never, never took time. I never took time out anyway, never, for nothing. (G: Before?) Before, not before, never, I work until the last day. (G: Really) Yes. My boss, Mike Ray, used to tell me, I don't know where he is, but he's such a nice guy, he was such a nice man, "Francisca are you going to have the baby over here? I don't want to deliver that baby! I don't want to deliver that baby!" And I know I went home after, I was working, I was feeling fine, the next morning I had the baby. And he says, "I told you you were going to have the baby over here!" So I waited to the last, last day, because I want to stay home after. And I stayed home for three weeks. And I came to talk with Mike. He was that kind of man that we could talk to him. It's not very often that we have a person like that. And I told him, "Mike, I would like more time off, but I don't know what to do, because they want me to go to the doctor and get a notice that I cannot work." And he says, "What are you waiting for? You just had a baby. They don't know what's going down there. So tell them that something is wrong and you have some time at home!" So I went back to my doctor and I explained to him that I need more time with the baby, stay home with the baby. And he said, "Oh, you have an infection." I said, "Where?" And I stayed home another month. I loved that. I stayed home because they pay me. (G: Not pay you) But they did pay me, and I needed that money. They paid \$80.00 a week. \$80.00 a week. [That wasn't bad].

K: But would they have held your job if you had just decided to stay home for an extra month, and you didn't have your doctors papers? Would they have held your job?

F: No they won't. No, no, no, they wouldn't.

K: Now were things different in '84 when you had Elizabeth?

F: No, the same. I was always the same. Always the same.

G: So would you have lost your job if you?

F: If I stay home more time, yes I would lose my job.

G: Even though you had seniority there.

F: Even, when you have too much seniority you can talk it over with the bosses, (G: I see) okay, and they can give you one or two weeks home without pay and after you come

back. They can change you to another shift. They can cut your pay. It depends how the person, the person that is there can do to you. But that place has work very bad with people. They don't treat people right. People, in me when I see things the way I see it, I think people were treated very bad, because they needed time off. They needed to see, like people die and they are from another country, they should have the time to go to mourning for his relative no matter who it is, mother, or father. They wouldn't allow them to go. I had a friend like Maria Pais that I talked about it. She had a son that he's working in a bank now downtown, Joe, Manny Pais, and he had a tremendous accident and he was in coma. He was, they had to have a helicopter getting from the disaster. He had a big, big, what do you call it? What is a big accident, a big, big one. He was, he was by himself. He didn't hurt nobody or anything.

G: Umhm, in an automobile?

F: Automobile accident. And he was in coma. And they, he was, all of his bones were broken. And he was two, I think one or two months he was in coma. And he has to be lift by a helicopter to another hospital from Saint Joseph's because they couldn't do nothing with him. It was terrible. And that woman was there working third shift. I never forgot that. And she was crying the whole night because she didn't know what was going on with her son, and they never let her go, because, because she has a problem with migraines. She had that problem all her life, migraines. I know her for, now for thirty years. She always worked with me, always, all the time. She was a weaver too, and we worked together. She's from the main land. She's from Portugal, the main land. And every time she has that migraine she's going crazy. She can see the light, she throws up. She, poor thing, she suffers so much, and there is nothing, she takes every pill on the counter, nothing works. She's been in doctors. She has tremendous migraines, and she has to be out of work when she had that. Because she has some days out before with the migraines, the don't let her go. They said, "If you go you lose your job." This is some human thing to do.

G: When did this happen? When was this?

F: It was in 90, she had ah, no, '97. (G: Okay) '97, '98.

G: Yah, but that, was that their policy all along, that you can only take so much time off?

F: We have to take sick day. We don't have sick days. We don't have sick days, but we can be out in one month, one day a month. And we, you have to wait two more months. Oh wait, every two months, every two months you have one day.

G: One sick day.

F: One sick day, but you are not paid for, but you can be out. (G: I see) But they don't pay you. (G: Okay) No pay.

G: And has that been always the policy? That's the way (--)

F: It's been always like that, because before it was like that. It's always been like that.

G: So it's not a very progressive policy.

F: No, no. They just keep it that way. I don't if that is from Tewksbury, you know, from (G: Tyngsboro?) Tyngsboro yes, Tyngsboro that had the policy there, or if something over here they have with the bosses and supervisors and the management there. I don't understand that.

G: Management might have a different policy.

F: Policy, yes. I don't know. They never explained to us.

G: They never said that to you.

F: No, no, we just figured it out.

G: What about your vacation time? Were you always given vacation?

F: Vacation, we have one week vacation for ten years. After ten years, until your fifth year, you have, fifteen year, you have two weeks vacation. And after fifteen years being in there you have four weeks vacation. But it's very funny, because the four weeks you cannot take it at once. You take two weeks in summertime, during the summertime. It can be May, June, July, it doesn't matter. You have two weeks. And after you have two weeks in December. You cannot have the four weeks together. We never, never had. Before, in the 80's, we used to take the four weeks if we had, the people that had the four weeks, you can take the four weeks, but after, about in the 90's they started having people going to Columbia, and Chili and other, the South America. Far away, and they take more time. So they decided nobody will take no more time. If you have four weeks you can't take the four weeks. You just have two weeks in the summer, and at the end of December, before the New Year you would have your other two weeks vacation.

G: Were you required to take those two weeks in December, or could you take them say?

F: If you don't take, they don't care. They want you working. If you want to work that's fine with them. They will pay you the paid vacation. (G: I see) Yes. If you work it's fine with them because they don't have to pay overtime to another person to work in your place.

G: Now you mentioned, you mentioned that in '96, (F: Yes) '95 they took out the rapier looms.

F: Yes, all of them.

G: And what, how did that affect you?

F: A lot. A lot, because most of the people had to get other jobs. They didn't have the jobs for everybody. So it was a tremendous lay-off. And the oldest people like me and Olivia Maldonado, and Marguerita Rango, and Alice Paez and her husband Joe Paez, the oldest ones, they give us the opportunity to go to the knitting department. They were needing people there. So we had to work third shift. We went from first for all my life to work on first shift, to work third shift.

G: And what were those hours?

F: It was from 10:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning.

G: This is after having worked there for many years.

F: For ah, oh my God, for twenty years.

G: Yes, all of a sudden you're having to work third shift (F: Yes) in the knitting department.

F: In the knitting department. And I had, oh what do you call it, the boss (Tom Petros) there, I don't remember his name. My God he just left a few months ago. Maybe later on I will remember his name. (F: Yah) He called me and he said, "Francisca, you've been working with us for a long time, and I like you." I don't if it was true or not, but he said that. "You are a hard worker and I'm going to give you an opportunity to go to the knitting department. I'm not going to give you lay-off." I said, "Okay." He told me, I'm going to have five more machines coming in for the knitting department, and when they are in you're going to be on first shift. Okay. I worked with him for a long time, I said, "Okay, I'm going to trust him." So I went on third shift for fifteen months, and as soon as they had the machines installed I went on first shift. 9G: Okay. Uh huh) He kept his promise.

G: Now you shifted from weaving to knitting. Did you (--)

F: It was a complete, oh my god, for me it was a disaster.

G: Well let me ask you then before that, did you, did somebody else who had that job, were they laid off so you could take that position?

F: No. (G: Okay) What they did, they were going to have five more machines in, and they had five machines a person. So they needed three more knitters. It was me on first, Marguerita on second, and Alice on third.

G: Okay.

F: So we would be the three women, the oldest ones over there. (G: Right) So I went on the knitting department. Oh my God! That was day and night. I didn't understand

one thing about that machine. It was so many, many, oh! They had beams, a lot of beams. One, two, three, four, five beams. They had a lot of yarn. They had [harness], different kind of [harness]. The drop wires, millions of drop wires. At the time I thought it was really millions of drop wires. I said, "Oh my God!" There was all that beams and rolls, and rolls, all different. Oh I was so confused. And I had all the kind of tools that I have to work with. Oh I was so confused. "I my God, I said, I will never learn this job." I couldn't see. I had to get my glasses, because I couldn't see, because it's a very tiny, tiny, tiny needles. (G: Yes) And we had to put the hook, and cut the yarn, but we don't see it, we don't see it. After a while, a long while we do that without even think what we're doing, but when we start learning. Oh, [he is me,] poor Francisca crying again. I said, "Oh my. I just came to this country to cry in these jobs!" [Laughs] But after awhile I start working, and I like the job, and I liked the people there. They were good, and the supervisors were nice.

G: They weren't as noisy, were they, as the rapiers?

F: Oh they are noisy too.

G: Were they?

F: Oh yes. Oh yes. We have to wear the ear protection all the time, all the time. They were noisy.

G: Did you get a pay increase in knitting?

F: Yes, we were making fifteen dollars an hour, plus piecework, because over there they do it. I think, I don't know about other factories, but I believe all this kind of weaving and knitting and, they press people to (G: To work harder) work harder and they give the production so they will be more enthusiastic. "Hey, I'm doing some money!" That's what I think, I don't know. I never work another place before, but I believe they are all the same.

G: Were there mostly women there as well as knitters?

F: Yes, yes. The knitters are all women. Just third shift they have two or three men. They had, now it's gone too. It's nothing there. Even the knitting department shut down last months. Yes.

G: Maybe we should (--) We are (--) I don't want to keep you too much longer, but I wanted to ask you, (F: Yes) when you mentioned that recently Joan Fabric and Elkin McCallum sold out part of the (F: The company, yes) operation (F: the operation) to Collins and Aikman. Were you there for a while after Collins and Aikman took over?

F: In the knitting department, yes, we were there for about let's see, five months? Four or five months.

G: Tell us the changes you saw when that change occurred.

F: To tell you the truth there was no changes. They just keep going the same way. That's what scared me. I started seeing (--) The things that really happened, okay. The changes, okay, is that they start slowing down. We didn't have no overtime. No Saturdays, no, everything stopped, start going really slow, like slow motion. "Oh we don't have to do these. We don't need this cloth now." We started changing machines. I would have three machines, four machines, and from that girl, that girl will go to the other set and work on two or three machines, different ones. We always had one here, another there, another there.

G: So you were being switched around?

F: Switched around because they don't need this cloth. I was weaving one kind of cloth, but they don't need that. All of a sudden they don't need. So I had to go for another kind of cloth. So I had to jump in front of me, two or three rows to get another machine. You know, I was kind of start going like that. I said, "Oh oh, umhm, I don't think we're going to be here for long." "Oh, we have too much work." I didn't believe it. I never believed that.

G: Now you said that Elkin never told people. (F: Never) Tell me about that. So you had no clue that they were selling the company?

F: No, we had no clue they were selling. We had no clue that we were going to get out of there. Never. They always told us, the supervisors and the bosses, they always told us "We are fine. We are going to be here for a long time. We have a lot of orders. We have a lot of customers. Don't worry about it. Everything is fine." Until the last moment, because they knew people would be looking for jobs, and they would be with nobody to work, and they want to finish their work. Like they finished last week with one machine left. They finished.

Tape II, side A ends
Tape II, side B begins

G: When did you, where did you learn that Collins and Aikman had bought the plant?

F: In the newspapers. They never told us anything, never, never, never. They never had the meeting to tell (--) Well they had two meetings with us, and they said that everything was fine. "Oh we cannot predict something that's going to happen next year, but we are doing fine, nobody has to worry about anything. If you have something to do just go ahead and do it, because we are fine, and we're going to be here for a long time. And about a couple of months later we heard, I read in the newspaper.

G: How did you feel about that?

F: Well I felt like going up there and just beat them up. That's why I said, called them liars, because they were liars. They should talk to us and tell us the truth. Tell us "In a couple of months we're going to be out of here." We saw the machines move. They start taking out all the machines from the knitting, one by one they start taking them out someplace. I don't even know where, because they don't explain to us where they go. We just seen them go by. Hey, bye bye, another one, and another one, and that's it. They don't even tell us we are moving the machines because we're going to be shut down. Okay. They never did. They never explained anything to any of us, and I think it's very wrong.

G: Now were you still, when Collins and Aikman bought the plant, were still being paid by Joan Fabrics, or were you now (--)

F: Joan Fabrics until the end, always.

G: Okay. So even though Collins and Aikman owned the plant, (F: Yes, we were) you were still an employee of Joan's.

F: Joan's, yes.

G: Isn't that a strange arrangement?

F: Yes, but I don't understand it. (G: Okay) I really don't understand, and nobody knew. Nobody knew what was going on, because it was just between them.

G: Did you see some new people in management coming in there and doing some work as well?

F: They had new people coming. I don't even know their names, because they never (G: Introduced themselves?) introduced themselves. They just go by and look at us and they don't pay attention to anybody. It was cold. After that we don't feel like staying there. Even we don't care. A few months going by you know, and we look at each other and say, "I don't care to work here anymore." Because I don't know nobody, they don't even talk to us, they don't explain anything. We just feel like, "Hey, I don't care anymore."

G: Were they laying people off gradually?

F: Yes. And I believe they did that because they don't have to pay us anything. If they shut down and send everybody home, they have to give us some money. That way they just give us little by little they were going to lay off people. So they don't have to pay you anything. That's what they did.

G: So there was, there was no severance package in other words. (F: Nothing) You just got laid off.

F: Just laid off.

G: And when were you finally laid off?

F: November 9th, last year.

G: November 9th of 2001?

F: 2001.

G: And were you one of the last there, or were there still others?

F: No, no, there was still two more people there. Two girls.

G: Two more in the knitting department.

F: Yes, two more girls in the knitting department. And after, because he told me, my supervisor, he told me if I want to go to third shift again, because they two girls that were there, they were older than me in the company. They were coming from plant one, so they were older than me of course. And they were going to stay on first, and I had to move to third. And I said, "Billy," Bill Sherman.

G: Bill Sherman.

F: Yes. I said, "Bill, I'm not going to go on third shift again. I did that once. Now I'm getting old. I'm not going to do that no more. If I don't have a job on first shift, just lay me off. I will go home and I will try to find something." I don't want to be (--). If you tell me, I asked him, "If you tell me I'm going to be on third shift for awhile, or for a year, I don't care, but you tell me that I'm going to be up on first shift again, and working over here, it's fine." And he looked at me and he just give one of that smiles, and he says, "Francisca, no. It's just going to be a couple of months." And that I believed right away. I said, "Okay, I'm not going to third shift for a couple of months.

G: So he let the cat out of the bag.

F: Yes. Until then he says, "Oh, I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what's going to happen." And everybody knew. Maybe they really didn't know really, really what was going to happen, (G: Yes. Yes) but they knew that things were not good, but they never let us go. They never let us know that. That was bad.

G: How do you feel about Elkin McCallum after this?

F: I think he did very, very bad. He was very wrong what he did, and he didn't, he's not a man of his word, because he always told us that he was going to look after us, and he was going to take care of the business, because he loves the weaving and he loves the knitting department, and he just let everything go. He don't even say nothing to us. Not even have a meeting. He didn't have the, I know, the courage to tell us this is going to

happen, and I'm sorry but I can't keep the business, something went bad, or something like that. I think that we, he owed us an explanation. But he never showed up, never said nothing. He just disappeared. He just disappeared, that's it.

G: Did you ever try to contact him?

F: No. No, but I would like to see him. I always tell the girls, "I wish I could see him."

G: You'd tell him a few things.

F: Yes. Yes. What he did was very wrong. Because I had my heart on him. I always trust that man, and I'd say, he's going to do something. I don't believe he's going to leave us like this. He's going to do something. Maybe he's going to tell us to go to another company. He's doing something for us I thought. And they say, "Oh you're stupid, you believe that," the girls. They were smarter. I said, "Oh I trust that man. I think he's going to do something." But he didn't.

G: The other girls didn't (--)

F: It was a deception for me.

G: They didn't trust him so much.

F: No. No. I trust him. I trust him, but I was wrong. I was wrong.

G: Did the company Collins and Aikman offer any people other jobs in other parts of the country do you know?

F: There was people from, but they're supervisors, and engineers and things like, people like that. They went to New Bedford, and they moved around.

G: And North Carolina?

F: Yes. They moved around. (G: Okay) I find out that after.

G: Uh huh.

F: But not the weaver. We have no skilled to, to go for another job.

G: So you were not offered an opportunity to take a job with the company somewhere else?

F: No. The, three weeks ago they sent me a letter telling me that they have openings on Dutton Street.

G: In Dutton Street?

F: In Dutton Street.

G: Dutton Yarns.

F: Dutton Yarns.

G: Uh huh. So you got a letter from?

F: From Joan's. They were telling me to go there, but no. (G: Why? Why wouldn't you?) Very bad, very bad job. It's all dusty, and oh, it's terrible. Just in tremendous emergency I will go there.

G: Do you know people who work there?

F: No. That's all new people.

G: How do you know about the conditions here?

F: A friend of mine went there. I didn't went there. My friend went. Maria, you know Maria Paez, (G: Oh she did) she went there. (G: Oh really) And she called me and she said, "Francisca, it's terrible." I heard from other people that it was terrible, because there's a lot of dust in the air.

G: And they're strictly producing yarn there.

F: Yes, just yarns, yes.

G: And dyeing too? Are they dyeing there too?

F: No I don't think so. I think it's just the yarn. They're just making, producing the yarn. (G: Okay) And she says, "Hi Francisca, please!" I went, they didn't have the job. They were already filled. All the openings were filled already, but she went anyway. And she said, "Hi Francisca, please don't go, that's terrible! Oh my God I never knew they had a place like that to work!" It's already, the places they have are already worse than the ones that we had before. Oh!

G: This is back in the old Prince Pasta Plant.

F: Yes. Yes. Yes, I didn't went there. I didn't went. I said I'm going to wait and get my lay-off and doing some cleaning around, and (--)

G: Is your friend Maria still there?

F: She's still home like me. We are waiting for jobs.

G: Okay. So she worked for a little while at Dutton and then left.

F: And left. She, she couldn't stand that. She has that tremendous migraines and she got sinus. Oh she's really sick. I don't have sinus, but she's a woman that oh my God. When she says that she's sick, because she loves money, she loves money, but when she says, "I'm sick" we have to believe it, because she is. She is sick.

G: Let me just ask you quickly a couple of other names. Did you know Luis Alvarado? Kikay?

F: Yes. Yes. Luis Alvarado, yes.

G: He's a delightful man. What?

F: Yes, very, very nice man. I met him in one of the breakfast. Yes, and I met him another time when we went, because we didn't have insurance. We didn't have to (--)
Oh my God, we have a lousy insurance.

G: Health coverage.

F: Health coverage, very, very bad. Very bad health coverage. It didn't cover nothing. They said, "To cover everything." It didn't cover anything. So they want Blue Cross Blue Shield to go in. And they called all of us to make like a statement. (G: A petition?) See if you want that or not. And we went and I met him there. Luis is a very nice person. (G: Yes) Very, very nice man.

G: So he was promoting, he was helping to promote a better health insurance.

F: A better health insurance.

G: What happened? Did it succeed?

F: We got it. (G: Yes) We got the Blue Cross Blue Shield. (G: Uh huh) Better, better insurance. Of course we have to pay, but at least we have cover.

G: So your co-pay was higher.

F: \$53.00 a week for a family, for a family plan.

G: When was that? When was this, do you remember?

F: Oh, it was in, oh it was a long time ago. A long time ago. Maybe '79. (G: Yah) Maybe in '79, '80's.

G: But before that you had no health insurance?

F: They had health insurance, but it was no good.

G: Not a good policy.

F: Not a good policy.

G: You had to pay a lot. You had to pay a lot.

F: So you and other workers worked together and got the Blue Cross Blue Shield. And now we were working, before we left, we worked very hard to get dental. They didn't have dental, and everybody was screaming and yelling for the kids, you know, we need a dental policy. (G: Of course) And we got that. We had to pay \$12.00 a week, but it was nothing. It doesn't cost very much. It's Delta. Delta. Now I have Cobra, because I'm out of, out of a job. But it doesn't pay much, but at least it covers something. It's good. It's good.

G: Now I thought Kikay said that at some point though in the 90's Elkin had switched over to a company policy. It was no longer Blue Cross Blue Shield, but it was now a company health insurance, so that you were actually paying into Joan for your health insurance.

F: No, I don't know. I don't know about that, because after a while my husband get a very good insurance and we switched. (G: Oh I see) So now I don't know about that one. (G: Okay) No I don't. (G: Yes) I don't.

G: Well just to conclude, so what are your, how old are your kids now?

F: Well I have one that's twenty-seven years old, and she's pregnant to have a baby in June.

K: Congratulations!

F: I'm going, thank you, I'm going to be a grandmother again. I have Richard, he's 26, he had two little girls. They've been married for seven years. This one has been married for three years. And I have Elizabeth at home. She's finishing high school this year. And I have Sonya, then she came home from college, she finished college and she's speech therapy. She's graduating in speech therapy. And Deborah is a teacher. [Unclear], she in the computers. So they are all.

K: What are Elizabeth's plans?

F: Elizabeth is painting and decorating. She wants to be an interior decorator. So.

G: And do they all live in Lowell, or in the Lowell area?

F: They all live in, Deborah bought a house in New Hampshire, in Hudson, New Hampshire. Richard has a house on Mammoth Road. And the other two are home with me. I'm very happy to have them back. My daughter from, she was in Amherst.

K: UMass Lowell, I mean UMass Amherst.

F: UMass Amherst.

G: When did you move to South Highland Street?

F: Oh, twenty-three years ago. (G: Oh okay) We bought the house there.

G: Oh, so you bought the house there.

F: I bought the house there when Sonya was born. She's twenty-three. Yes.

G: Well Francisca, thank you so much.

F: Oh you're welcome.

G: This has been very delightful.

F: Oh thank you.

K: Thank you very much.

F: I hope, (--) I just talk and talk. Oh my god!

K: It's fascinating

G: It's a wonderful interview.

F: Well thank you!

Interview ends